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Chairman: Mr. Busacca ..... (Italy)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Statement by the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs

1. **Mr. Desai** (Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs) said that development cooperation was not simply a matter of nations working together for the short- and medium-term management of the global economy but also involved shared values. Some of the issues that must be addressed by the development strategy were global environmental problems, growing inequalities between and within nations, the continuing pressure of poverty and social strife, and the fact that parts of the world had been left out of global development: the international community had a responsibility to promote development in such regions. All those issues made it clear that current development strategies were inadequate. It was important to examine whether sustainability, distribution and inclusion dimensions of growth were best dealt with by national corrective action, or whether there was a greater role for international cooperation and public policy. There was a need for the United Nations to define the role of public policy, and seek a new approach to development that would avoid the harmful consequences of dirigiste interventionism and an unrestrained laissez-faire approach to management. The work of the Third Committee made it particularly well qualified to address those issues.

2. The alternative sought had many dimensions, which included finding a balance between the roles of the State and the market. It was not merely a matter of social protection, but rather a search for structural changes to incorporate into policy the concerns of social inequality, inclusion, poverty eradication and gender mainstreaming. The role of the public budget, which was central, would have to be addressed. The recent UNCTAD trade and development report had drawn attention to the growing gap between developed and developing countries, the slow growth of employment, growing wage inequality between skilled and unskilled labour, the "hollowing out" of the middle class and the growing importance of finance over industry. That analysis showed that the processes of globalization had to be managed intelligently and in the interests of all countries and all segments of the population. Since what had to be managed was a global process, a measure of coherence between countries and different areas of policy was required. The Third Committee had a central role to play in addressing all the above issues and in influencing the shape of development endeavours at local and national levels.

3. With regard to United Nations reform, he said that he was addressing the Committee for the first time in his capacity as the head of the merged economic and social department. The consolidation of the three previously separate departments which made up that new department was part of the process established in order to improve coordination among the various entities of the United Nations Secretariat and institute cooperative arrangements with regard to policy analysis, technical assistance and management. It was also intended to strengthen links between intergovernmental processes and policy guidelines for operational activities. United Nations development activities would thereby be promoted and strengthened, and the United Nations capacity for responding to new issues enhanced.

Agenda item 102: Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family (A/52/3,* A/52/56, A/52/57-E/1997/4, A/52/60-E/1997/6, A/52/80-E/1997/14, A/52/183, A/52/328 and A/52/351; A/C.3/52/L.2 and L.3; E/1997/103 and E/1997/104)

4. **Mr. Langmore** (Director, Division for Social Policy and Development, Department of Economic and Social Affairs), introducing agenda item 102, said that the Committee had before it a number of reports. An operational framework for the International Year of Older Persons, 1999 (A/52/328) reached out to non-traditional actors, including the development sector, the media, the private sector and youth. It suggested that the Year should serve as an occasion for developing a long-term plan for the next decades, when the proportion of older persons was expected to greatly increase. The framework included examples of national preparations for 1999 and a menu of ideas to assist national committees in observing the Year. It also provided recommendations for the consideration of Member States.

5. The report of the Secretary-General on the International Year of the Family (A/52/57) provided an analysis of family-related provisions from the outcome of recent conferences, described follow-up activities to the International Year of the Family and set forth specific proposals for actions in accordance with General Assembly resolution 50/142. The proposals contained in the report suggested that the current family programme should concentrate on strengthening international cooperation on family issues.

* To be issued subsequently.

6. The report of the Secretary-General on the third review and appraisal of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons (A/52/351) assessed issues and trends for the period 1993-1997. It indicated that the Programme had stood up well to the test of time and was providing a valid and reliable framework for policy design and evaluation. It examined three issues which should be given policy priority: anti-personnel landmines and unexploded ordnance, children with disabilities, and the ageing of population structures and associated increases in impairment and disability.

7. Since 1965, the General Assembly had adopted three major, comprehensive international standards on youth. The third, the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, had proposed ten basic priority areas for action to achieve the objectives of International Youth Year and foster conditions and mechanisms to promote improved well-being and livelihood among young people. He drew the Committee's attention to the analytical review of problems and recommendations for action contained in chapter III of the report of the Secretary-General on implementation of that Programme of Action (A/52/60) and to the annexed country-by-country status of implementation of the Programme. The involvement of governmental and non-governmental youth constituencies was instrumental in the implementation of the Programme of Action. The Secretary-General was therefore most grateful to the Governments of Austria and Portugal for their support. The Secretariat was preparing a special study on the global situation of youth, which would be completed and submitted to both the global youth meetings in Portugal in 1998.

8. The report of the Secretary-General on Implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development (A/52/305), shortly to be considered by the plenary Assembly, contained illustrative information on initiatives and activities undertaken since the last session of the Assembly on the follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development. It also set out the preparatory process already agreed upon by the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council for the special session in the year 2000. The Secretary-General had spoken in his first annual report of "an era of realignment" (A/52/1, para. 1). All the reports to which he (Mr. Langmore) had alluded concerned social programmes attempting to tackle effectively some of the issues caused by that realignment: increase of population age, pressure on families, growth of the extent of disability, the intensified needs of youth and the follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development. Those programmes were aimed at achieving the "global public goods" to which the Secretary-General referred in paragraph 2 of his annual report. He hoped that Member States, in their statements to the Committee, would suggest ways of increasing the national and global effectiveness of those programmes.

9. **Mr. Otuyelu** (Nigeria) said that his delegation was seriously concerned about the widening gap between rich and poor nations, especially when globalization, privatization, structural adjustment programmes and external debt servicing were impairing the capacities of developing countries to provide basic social infrastructures. International development cooperation must be based on renewed human solidarity in order to assist the weaker members of society and enhance their ability to contribute to social development. Additional resources were, of course, essential for local capacity building in that area.

10. The 20/20 concept for resource allocation to social services could be helpful only if the ability of recipient countries to raise funds was not undermined by external debt servicing and currency speculation. In that regard, his delegation was pleased to note the recent position taken by the Bretton Woods institutions in support of relief to the most indebted least developed countries. It was time to work for a more humane international social order in which the welfare of all would be promoted through international cooperation. The widening gap between rich and poor nations and within States had great potential for social and political instability. The international financial institutions must reconsider their approach to development since many more people in the world today lacked access to basic social services. Greater international cooperation was necessary to address the problem of unemployment and issues relating to youth, the disabled and older persons.

11. **Mr. Spitzer** (United States of America) reiterated his delegation's appreciation that the International Labour Organization (ILO) had acknowledged the critical need to achieve the goal of sustainable full employment, taking into account social development and environmental protection. The United States strongly supported the efforts by ILO to support national programmes to combat child labour through the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour and its plans to complete the elaboration of a new international convention on the elimination of the most exploitative forms of child labour. Job promotion helped to enable all workers to share fully in the benefits of trade and economic growth. There was a need to ensure equal access to productive employment for all workers, both men and women, and disabled persons. Basic labour standards also lessened social antagonisms and promoted stability. The Third Committee should closely coordinate its work in the area of employment with the Second Committee.

12. He commended the efforts under way to prepare for the International Year of Older Persons, which would be an opportunity for Governments and non-governmental organizations to raise awareness of the miracle of longevity and the challenges accompanying it. His country had long advocated the inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities and would explore every opportunity for sharing information on steps taken in the areas of rehabilitation and legal measures. The growth of civil society in the developing world and in new democracies was particularly important in order to enable citizens to manage their own affairs, help set public-policy agendas and fill in critical gaps between public administration and the needs of the people. His delegation supported action to expand the access of non-governmental organizations to the General Assembly and to enhance the contributions of civil society to the work of United Nations bodies.

13. In view of the vital importance of such issues as youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family, the work of the Economic and Social Council and the Commission for Social Development must be efficient and focused. The Commission and the Third Committee were the appropriate forums for exchanging views in order to implement social development programmes and provide basic social services to all.

14. **Ms. Van Houte** (Netherlands), speaking as her delegation's youth representative, said that it was very disappointing to see that General Assembly resolutions on youth adopted in recent years had had virtually no effect. It was also unfortunate that few delegations had youth representatives, since they could bring the problems confronting young people to the attention of the General Assembly in a more effective and balanced way. Young people had a keen interest in political decision-making and could make a valuable contribution to policy formulation in both the public and private sectors.

15. The report on the second session of the World Youth Forum (A/52/80) contained many useful recommendations on issues relating to young people. Of particular importance was the recommendation to appoint a special rapporteur on youth rights in order to promote the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond. Too little was being done in response to important initiatives like the World Youth Forum. Yet, the recommendations made by young people were fully relevant to the work of United Nations bodies.

16. More and more private companies were taking account of the social and political situations of the countries in which they were working. That was of great importance to youth and other non-governmental organizations since it could involve young people in companies' internal discussions. Both sides could benefit from such exchanges of ideas. There were many opportunities for youth organizations in the area of unemployment. The youth sections of trade unions were well aware of the needs and desires of unemployed young people and were perhaps best placed to put forward proposals in that regard. Such a dialogue could be conducted at a number of levels, with the United Nations and its specialized agencies playing a role.

17. Participation by young people in the United Nations system was a very important issue. The World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth should address the issue of including youth representatives in national delegations to the General Assembly; and special arrangements should be made to ensure coordination between the Conference and the World Youth Forum so that all participating youth organizations could effectively participate in the follow-up.

18. **Ms. Moreno** (Paraguay), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, said that the Group was totally committed to the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development. The members of the Rio Group, which all had democratic Governments, were seeking to combat poverty and enable youth, older people and the disabled to benefit from economic and social development. The Group, which had actively participated in the first regional conference for the implementation of the World Summit for Social Development, held in São Paulo in April 1997, wished to reiterate its support for the consensus of São Paulo on the need to hold evaluation meetings in other regions.

19. The Rio Group was committed to the holding of the International Year of Older People and noted with satisfaction the work carried out in that regard. She took special note of the recommendations set out in the report on the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond (A/52/60). Subsequent reports on that question should contain a more detailed description of national policies and action programmes to address issues relating to young people. The Rio Group viewed with interest the preparations for the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth and believed that the results of that Conference would be very useful for Governments in their activities to promote the development of young people.

20. The members of the Rio Group attached particular importance to the family as the basic structure of society and reiterated their commitment to protect and promote the family. They also noted with interest the report on the

monitoring of the implementation of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (A/52/56) and underscored their support for the application of the Rules and the work of the Special Rapporteur. The member countries of the Rio Group would continue to carry out their responsibilities in the field of social development and pursue their efforts to eradicate poverty and promote overall human development.

21. **Ms. Sugimori** (Japan) welcomed actions taken to date by the United Nations system and other international organizations to follow up the World Summit for Social Development at the international and regional levels, as well as initiatives taken by national Governments individually or collectively and by members of civil society and non-governmental organizations. In that context, her Government would shortly adopt a national plan of action, after completing extensive consultations with ministries, agencies and non-governmental organizations dealing with such matters. The Government's strategy highlighted seven critical policy issues: employment, equal opportunities for men and women, social integration, support for the socially vulnerable, human development, protecting the environment by promoting sustainable development, and improving social infrastructure. It also called for the further strengthening of bilateral and multilateral development cooperation.

22. Following the conclusion of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons in 1992, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) had designated the period from 1993 to 2002 as a decade of disabled persons. In December 1995, her Government had launched a national plan of action on disabilities, laying out specific measures to be taken by relevant ministries, agencies and institutions. The issue of disabilities was highlighted in Japan's policy on official development assistance. In the area of technical cooperation, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) worked to develop human resources and create vocational training schemes at rehabilitation centres in recipient countries. JICA also sought to involve persons with disabilities in formulating and implementing development projects. The role of non-governmental organizations was particularly crucial for the development of human resources in recipient countries and for disseminating information.

23. She drew attention to the impact that anti-personnel landmines had had on civilian life in post-conflict processes of reconstruction and rehabilitation. Most victims of mines were farmers, women and children in areas that had once been battlefields. There was an urgent need to accelerate the clearing of landmines, and her Government therefore had strongly supported United Nations landmine clearance activities and programmes for the treatment and rehabilitation of victims. Japan's financial support in that area amounted to nearly $30 million. A number of Japanese non-governmental organizations provided humanitarian assistance for the victims of landmines.

24. Japan welcomed activities in international forums to prepare for the International Year of Older Persons in 1999. Preparations had begun in Japan for the observance of the Year at the national level.

25. The United Nations system, other international and regional organizations, Governments, and members of civil society must work together in a spirit of cooperation and partnership to achieve the targets set out in the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action. Japan would play an active role in that process, based on its experience in that vitally important area.

26. **Ms. Martínez** (Ecuador) associated her delegation with the statement made by Paraguay on behalf of the Rio Group, and recalled that the President of Ecuador, addressing the General Assembly, had described that country's national social development plan, which was designed to overcome poverty, promote industrial activity, and promote the social integration of vulnerable sectors of society.

27. In August 1996, her Government had presented a national action plan for Ecuadorian youth, integrating the individual and collective needs of young people in the present and the future. The plan was intended to tackle problems facing young people, including unemployment, delinquency and abuse of drugs and alcohol, so that the young could benefit from sufficient time and resources for a successful transition to adulthood.

28. Her delegation welcomed the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond (A/52/60) and expressed gratitude to the Government of Portugal for offering to host the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth.

29. As for the preparations for the International Year of Older Persons, her delegation supported the adoption of the theme "Towards a society for all ages". She was pleased to inform the Committee that a national council for older persons had recently been created in Ecuador. Her delegation also welcomed the operational framework for the International Year of Older Persons contained in document A/52/328 and reiterated its support for the open-ended working group established within the framework of the

Commission for Social Development; it would continue to inform that group on activities at the national level.

30. Persons with disabilities represented 13 per cent of the population of Ecuador and, despite laws protecting them against discrimination and other forms of unfair treatment, their disadvantaged position was closely linked to the overall socio-economic conditions in the country. It was therefore vitally important to move forward in the area of international development cooperation.

31. Ecuador was a strong defender of the family as the indisputable nucleus of a society oriented towards the well-being of its citizens. The family had a positive role to play in the promotion and protection of all human rights, including the right to development.

32. **Ms. Camerano** (Colombia) said that her Government had been exploring ways of implementing the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. The Colombian Constitution established the principle of non-discrimination, and a national consultative committee had been created to follow up the establishment of policies, strategies and programmes for the integration of persons with disabilities. However, despite legislative developments, the financial resources allocated to integration were scarce, particularly in the field of education. Her delegation therefore proposed that priority should be given to the allocation of the technical and financial resources of the United Nations system to support educational programmes in that area and that the year 2000 should be designated "international year for the integrated education of persons with disabilities".

33. In the area of follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development, her delegation supported the opening up of debates to the participation of experts. The postulates of the Summit were reflected in her Government's social policy. Among the most important issues were: development as a framework for social progress, access to new technology by developing countries, diverting funds from military spending towards social development, promoting international cooperation, and increasing the commitment of international financial institutions to social development programmes in developing countries.

34. Colombia, recognizing that young people were multidimensional human beings, encouraged the building of their individual and collective identities. Her Government's strategies were aimed at creating and strengthening institutional capacity to care for the young, improve their quality of life, and encourage their involvement in the economic arena.

35. Recalling that paragraph 1 of General Assembly resolution 50/81 had identified 10 priority areas for the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, she said that, in the light of the current tendency towards confrontation in all areas of global society, it was vital that the World Programme should include the topic of peace and coexistence. Its success would require the commitment of developed countries and of organizations and institutions responsible for its implementation, so that those countries which were at a relative disadvantage could achieve the conditions needed for improving the quality of life.

36. The family, as the fundamental unit of society, played an important role in the weaving of the social fabric. It was in the family that children acquired the principles of morality and ethics; hence the importance of policies and actions to strengthen family unity.

37. On the initiative of the First Lady of Colombia, a regional summit on childhood for Latin America and the Caribbean would be held in Colombia in March 1998. Her Government looked forward to the interest and support of United Nations bodies, non-governmental organizations, and regional organizations.

38. Colombia supported the proclamation of 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons. The topic of the elderly had been incorporated within the framework of the laws and decrees defining Colombia's social investment policy, which aimed at bettering the life of the country's senior citizens.

39. **Ms. Alvarez** (Dominican Republic), speaking with reference to the social integration of older persons, said that the Commission for Social Development should include the principle of interdependence and the role of individuals of all types and ages in an integrated society. As a developing country, the Dominican Republic was particularly interested in the concept of "active ageing", and in replacing dependence with interdependence as a model for interaction between older people and the rest of society. In order to attain a true "society for all ages", people of all ages must be brought back into society, their interdependence within that society must be emphasized, and the positive contribution of older people to that society must be reflected in the information media.

40. **Mr. García González** (El Salvador) said that the agenda item concerning social development was of particular importance for his delegation, as were the items concerning international drug control and the advancement of women. One of his Government's major commitments was to contribute to the achievement of social peace and national development through the strengthening and protection of the

family and its members. His delegation would collaborate closely with other delegations which also gave priority to promoting and protecting the family as the fundamental building-block of society, caring for the young, focusing on the needs of school-age children in rural areas, the social integration of persons with disabilities, and efforts to change attitudes within the family through the promotion of civic, moral and spiritual values.

41. In the light of the importance of those issues and their relevance to the shaping of national policies and to the implementation of programmes in the field, his delegation would endeavour to make the most constructive contribution possible to the work of the Committee.

42. **Ms. Bennani** (Morocco) said that the time had come to mobilize resources to attain the goals of the World Summit for Social Development. As the past decade's economic growth had not benefited all sectors of Moroccan society, the Government had developed a five-year social realignment plan, aimed primarily at rural areas and basic infrastructure, and had launched a programme of social priorities in cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), World Food Programme (WFP), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), European Union (EU) and the World Bank. That programme emphasized measures to promote female literacy and the education of girls in rural areas, as well as to reduce maternal mortality rates and integrate women in development. The Government had also taken measures to promote the participation of youth in society and the economy, and to provide a favourable legal environment for micro-enterprises.

43. **Mr. Ando** (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)) said that in view of the compelling need to focus on and respond to the challenges faced by youth, most of whom lived in developing countries, the United Nations system should facilitate young people's participation and opinions at all stages of its activities. Following the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development and the adoption of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond at the fiftieth session of the General Assembly, the Fund had intensified its focus on meeting the health needs of youth and promoting adolescent reproductive health. It was also actively participating in current and upcoming meetings of international organizations concerned with issues of importance to youth.

44. **Ms. Sibal** (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)), referring to the progress report on the implementation process of the education for all objectives contained in document A/52/183, said that the progress made in the provision of primary schooling was not being matched by a reduction of adult illiteracy; nor had the literacy gap between men and women declined. Moreover, few Governments in the developing world had defined national policies or targeted funds to promote early childhood development. UNESCO would therefore welcome a General Assembly resolution calling for "new approaches and strategies capable of bringing quality education within the reach of all, including the poor, the remote and those with special educational needs", as urged in the penultimate paragraph of the Amman Affirmation (A/52/183, annex).

45. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization welcomed the United Nations system's efforts to coordinate policies in the area of youth, and was itself actively involved in those efforts worldwide. It was also endeavouring to promote adult education and to explore the implications of the "society for all ages", with emphasis on the need for gender-sensitive lifelong learning.

The meeting rose at 5.25 p.m.